

Toward A Better Understanding of Epicurean Justice And Injustice (With Examples of "Just" and "Unjust")

Post by "Cassius" of March 21, 2021 at 11:04 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

In light of there being no absolute justice (or ideal virtue of justice), how do we determine if an act (or law) is just? How do we act justly?

Can you provide a specific scenario that would illustrate someone acting justly? Or the opposite?

That's not a challenge btw ☐ just a clarifying question.

You're wrestling on but you almost have the opposition pinned, and the referee is counting down to the end of the match!

I think the obvious answer to your question and the obvious implications of the final ten [PD10](#)'s all point back in the same direction as saying "the goal is pleasure" or "pleasure is the alpha and omega of the blessed life."

Just like you can't truly know the difference between courage and foolhardiness, or wisdom vs stupidity, or any other virtue vs its opposite, you can't judge "justice" or "injustice" without looking to the results of the particular set of facts.

And worse than that from an absolutists' point of view, when you do look at it from that relativistic point of view, you're drawn to the conclusion that these words like "justice" and "virtue" were nothing more than "words" from the very beginning -- which recalls the "last words of Brutus" supposedly recorded after the battle of Philippi (see my note):

The Wikipedia entry for the Battle of Philippi includes this (as of 09/01/17):

Plutarch also reports the last words of Brutus, quoted by a Greek tragedy "O wretched Virtue, thou wert but a name, and yet I worshipped thee as real indeed; but now, it seems, thou were but fortune's slave."

<https://newepicurean.com/note-on-the-la...o-not-plutarch/>

But to answer your question more directly, it sounds to me like Epicurus is allowing for a proper use of the word justice to refer to an agreement between consenting people for something that is in their mutual benefit - which means it brings them both pleasure. So it sounds like he thinks that in such a relationship it is proper to call that "justice." But he is also saying that as soon as

it ceases to be for the benefit of both it at that moment ceases to be "just." So in the end does the word "justice" really have any beneficial use other than in describing an agreement which is mutually beneficial to the people involved? I can't really see that it does, but then that's pretty much the same status as the other "virtues." I suppose that just like "wisdom" means "smart analysis that brings pleasure," Epicurus might say that "justice" means "an agreement (contract?) that brings pleasure to all parties to the contract." If so, then injustice might refer to "an agreement (contract? social relationship?) that does NOT bring pleasure to all parties in that relationship.

Maybe "justice" is a good general term for a specific type of "social relationship," or "agreement," but the terms "just" and "unjust" are going to be rigorously contextual.

I will be curious what Elayne has to say on this.